

## 100 Men Who Give a Damn donate \$10,000 to Inn from the Cold to combat homelessness

The spirited Mike Smith engaged '100 Men Who Give a Damn' and invited guests at Highland GM on Thursday night. In his opening address to the on-line and live group, the Chair of 100 Men expressed the goal to grow the organization from its current membership of '123 to 200 community members in 2025.'

Smith's goal is laudable, indeed, given that members donate \$401 per year and \$400 of that fee is not only tax-deductible, but the beneficial sums of either \$10,000 or \$1,000 are meted out by the organization at four quarterly meetings to three registered York Region charities.

In total, twelve charities are helped annually. \$1 per member covers the organization's annual banking fees so this is an efficient, volunteer-driven organization reliant on sponsors to host their quarterly meetings.

Highland GM provided delicious refreshments and a spacious staging area for the group of over 100 to convene their quarterly meeting and distribute funds to registered charities that are critical to York Region's social fabric.

As per the custom of the charitable organization, Teen Challenge received a top-up cheque of \$1,450 to augment the \$10,000 they received in September for their dedicated work with addicted teenagers at their facility in Snowball.

On Thursday, representatives from three charities 'NACCA, Inn from the Cold, and 3600 Kids ' each delivered five-minute presentations in the comfy confines of Highland GM's showroom about the uncomfortable social facts related to racial discrimination, homelessness, and sex trafficking.

After the sobering presentations and three engaging question periods, the membership voted on which charitable organization would receive the Grand Prize of \$10K as well as the secondary prizes of \$1,000 each for the second and third place finishers. It was determined by ballot that Inn from the Cold merited the \$10K allotment while NACCA and 3600Kids would receive \$1,000 each.

The Christmas spirit of giving was in plain view alongside some very nice-looking automobiles, tasty snacks, and a group of ardent Dickensian benefactors. All of these good things were conducted in just over one hour.

Evidence of the efficacy of the 100 Men Who Give a Damn distribution model was clear in a telephone interview with Serena Thompson on Tuesday. Thompson, the Executive Director and Founder of Lighthouse Learning and Development Centre on Edward Street in Aurora, delineated how much the benevolent organization's \$11K grant assisted the initiatives of autistic teenagers and adults.

Lighthouse's founder noted that the \$11K grant 'provided valuable opportunities for the participants in our community. It allowed us to reach out to the Els Centre in Florida, a world-renowned Adult Learning Centre for autistic teenagers and adults, and avail ourselves of their resources and expertise. The Els Centre was created by PGA Hall of Famer Ernie Els whose son, Ben, is autistic. We founded a partnership to completely replicate their world-class program. It was two grassroots organizations helping each other. This is a program unique to Canada.'

Lighthouse'in its tenth year of serving the community'has grown from six autistic students and 3 staff in 2015 to 51 participants and 27 staff. It helps families grapple with the challenges connected to autism.

Thompson reflected on Lighthouse's origins: 'I founded it almost ten years ago for my son, Daniel. I discovered I wasn't the only family with a child that was more capable than he was given credit for. The school officials would tell me that what I had was a discipline problem with Daniel when all he needed was the right supports, opportunities, and purpose.'

Thompson noted that the \$11K grant provided opportunities for our kids to be successful both in our classrooms and in our participants' entrepreneurial pursuits. Three of our adult learners created their own micro-candy business called 'Whimsy Sweets'. They sourced their favorite candy from Bulk Barn, and placed the treats in Candy Cones that are decorated and ready for order. NewRoads placed an order for 90 of the cones for a recent Christmas party.

There is a source of pride and accomplishment in Thompson's voice as she described the common purpose felt by the dynamic Lighthouse trio: 'They wanted to create their own jobs. They take the orders, respond to emails, assemble the candy cones, and complete the work themselves. They track their purchases, their budget, and make sure that each cone is filled with the right assortment of candies. There's a recipe for each type of cone. The grant we received from 100 Men who Give a Damn has given them purpose. All our employment programs are designed for participants who deserve an opportunity to show how capable they are.'

As Thursday's presentation at Highland GM showroom concluded and the '100 Men' Founder walked off-stage, the back of Mike Smith's grey t-shirt read 'Do you give a damn?' Clearly, his organization does and it continues to make a difference especially in the Christmas season of giving.

The next meeting of the '100 Men Who Give a Damn' is Thursday, March 6 at The Armoury. If you're interested in joining this benevolent organization for \$401 annually (\$400 of which is tax-deductible), meets four times a year, and provides local charities with as much as \$50,000 annually, go to [info@100menwhogiveadamn.com](mailto:info@100menwhogiveadamn.com).

**By Jim Stewart**